

Understanding Telephone Service

To understand the complexities of the telephone industry it helps to first understand the relationship of two major groups - ILECs and CLECs.

ILEC stands for Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier. The Incumbent carrier is the landline phone company that has the “monopoly” to provide service in your geographic area. The largest ILEC in New Hampshire is FairPoint.

For a list of current ILECs and their relevant information, please visit <http://www.puc.nh.gov/Telecom/ilecs.htm>.

CLEC stands for Competitive Local Exchange Carrier. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 created the opportunity for a deregulated, competitive telecommunications environment. CLECs can compete for the local exchange service customers of the ILEC. CLECs can build their own local loops using wired or wireless technologies, or they can lease local loops from the ILECs at wholesale rates for resale to customers. CLECs can include cellular providers, internet service providers (ISPs), cable TV providers, and others.

For a list of current CLECs and their relevant information, please visit <http://www.puc.nh.gov/Telecom/clecs.htm>

Some customers of local residential telephone service may have competitive alternatives, while others may not. Your alternatives for local residential telephone service depend upon whether competitors are serving residential customers in your specific geographic area.

If you can find a CLEC who offers service to residential customers in your area, you may have a choice, but you may need to purchase a bundle consisting of more than just local calling. Wireless phone service may also be an option in some areas. Again, there are differences in services offered, as well as pricing, which may mean that wireless is not truly comparable to landline service. For example, some areas do not have good cell phone service or you may experience frequent dropped calls. Cellular phone calling plans are often very different from landline calling plans and may include such things as roaming charges which apply when the caller uses the phone outside of a “home” calling area. Be sure to read the “fine print” to understand all of the charges under a particular plan.

The New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission (PUC) does not have jurisdiction to regulate wireless/cellular service, out-of-state long distance, or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone services. There is currently an investigation into the regulatory status of IP Enabled Voice Telecommunications Services under consideration by the PUC. To read more about that case see <http://www.puc.nh.gov/Regulatory/Docketbk/2009/09-044.html>.

When shopping for phone service you may review the Quality of Service reports for certain companies on the Public Utilities Commission's website to aid in your selection. Those reports can be found at http://www.puc.nh.gov/Telecom/Service%20Quality/Quality_Of_Service.htm. You may also call the Public Utilities Commission at 1-800-852-3793 for their assistance with choosing a provider.

To see whose service territory you are located in, visit the Public Utilities Commission's website that lists what company services each town, <http://www.puc.nh.gov/Consumer/communitiesserved.pdf>.

OCA Related Newsletters:

The OCA published its Fall 2005 Newsletter regarding telephone service and how to shop for service, which you can view at <http://www.oca.nh.gov/Newsletters/SummerRatewatcher2005.pdf>. For more newsletters, see our Newsletters page, <http://www.oca.nh.gov/newsletters.htm>.

Assistance Programs

1. Linkup New Hampshire. This program reduces the usual installation charges for local telephone service by 50 percent (up to \$30.00). This discount does not apply to any work required to install inside wiring or telephone jacks.
2. Lifeline Telephone Assistance. This program provides a monthly reduction on your residential telephone bill.

To qualify for Link-Up New Hampshire or the Lifeline Telephone Assistance programs, you must be participating in Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing, Low Income Home Energy Assistance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or the National School Lunch Program. You are eligible if your household income is at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. To apply contact your local telephone company. See our Life-line Linkup Page for more details, <http://www.oca.nh.gov/Lifeline-Linkup.htm>.